Open Burning Guidelines – Hurricane Isabel Cleanup Effort

There are regulatory, safety and environmental concerns that must be considered when open burning vegetative waste debris. These include obtaining applicable permits from local/state/federal regulatory agencies, providing reasonable methods to control or extinguish fires, and ensuring proper management of wastes to be burned (and the ash generated).

Open Burning is an acceptable waste management practice only in very specific circumstances. Infrequent open burning is allowed at sanitary landfills only and is restricted to management of specific wastes that include: Agricultural wastes, Silvicultural wastes, Landclearing debris, Diseased trees, and ***Debris wastes from emergency cleanup operations***. Before or during emergencies, DEQ may issue emergency permits for open burning of debris wastes. Debris wastes include, but are not limited to stumps, wood, brush, and leaves.

In general, DEQ regulations allow infrequent open burning of debris waste at sanitary landfills. However, in some cases specific permit conditions may prohibit open burning at the landfill. In these cases, an emergency permit would be needed to open burn. In all cases, open burning on areas where solid waste has been disposed is ***strictly prohibited***. Open burning should be conducted in accordance with the requirements and operating procedures (including fire safety plan) in the permit. In cases where specific procedures/protocols are absent from the permit, the guidelines below should be followed.

It is recognized that open burning of debris waste from emergency operations will typically include "green" vegetation and wood wastes with high moisture content. Complaints about burning are mainly associated with smoke, therefore smoke generation must be managed for safety as well as aesthetic reasons. If open burning is not conducted in an efficient and effective manner, generation of excess smoke may cause problems for individuals with respiratory problems, obscure visibility causing a hazard for vehicles and aircraft, or create an aesthetically displeasing (e.g., odor, visibility) environment for adjacent property owners.

Because smoke is usually a problem with inefficient burning, the guidelines below may assist to minimize smoke generation and subsequent complaints about open burning:

1) Communicate with local fire officials. Invite the Fire Department to your site. Seek technical assistance on techniques for **safe and efficient** open burning that will minimize smoke, fire, runoff, and ash hazards from the operation. **Post emergency numbers and contact information for the local fire department and permit holders/site operators.** Under certain operating (e.g. Forest Service burn condition warnings, high winds, etc.) or permit conditions, proper amounts and type of fire equipment should be readily available or operations should be suspended.
2) Consider starting or ending burns at night. Typically, there is less wind at night, most people are indoors, and there is less traveling at night.
3) Restrict burning to vegetative waste only. Burning other waste may increase smoke production or generate unpleasant odors. Also, burning non-vegetative wastes may limit disposal options for the ash generated, or result in ash regulated as a hazardous waste.
4) Minimize the size of the burn pile by "burning up, not out". Avoid burning excessively large debris piles. A smaller sized burn pile will be more efficient if a proper consistent and constant feed rate is maintained.
5) Install and maintain appropriate setbacks from wood lines, streams, and property lines to ensure **a safe and effective** operation. Create and maintain a firebreak (1½ times pile height) around the burn pile that is devoid of leaves, sticks, root mat, or other combustible materials. Besides a fire hazard in themselves, overhanging trees can capture smoke causing it to linger rather than disperse efficiently.
6) Install and maintain appropriate run-on/off controls to minimize ponded water in/around burn and storage areas. Ditching, berms, and silt fencing can control run-on/off at the site and divert it away from burn and storage areas.
7) Maintain a HOT burn. Maintaining a hot fire over time creates an efficient burn that minimizes smoke generation. Maintaining consistent/constant feed rates will avoid over-feeding and damping the fire.
8) Monitor the weather. A temperature inversion condition will allow smoke to linger.
9) Be prepared for wet weather. Light to moderate rain is usually not a problem for very hot fires. Maintain a well-balanced operation by adjusting burn rates to weather conditions and maintain a hot burn that minimizes smoke.
10) Maintain consistent and effective communication with adjacent property inhabitants. Post your permit. Provide a phone number or be available to address their concerns. Accepting constructive criticism and making reasonable adjustments to the operation will show you are responsive to community input and a good neighbor.

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